

# Preterm (Early) Labor

Most pregnancies last 40 weeks. If you go into labor between 20 and 37 weeks of your pregnancy, we call it preterm labor.

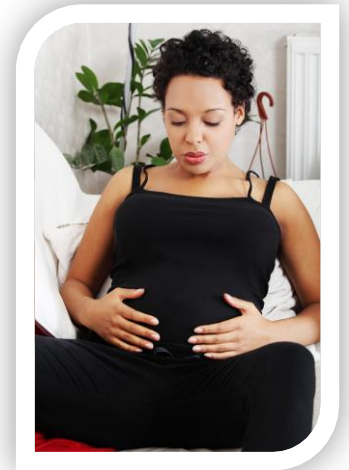
## Call OB Triage at 272-2460 if:

- ⚠️ you have any signs of preterm labor for more than one hour (see below for the signs of preterm labor).
- ⚠️ you have any fluid or blood leaking from your vagina.

**It may be possible to prevent a preterm birth by getting care early!**

## What Are The Signs of Preterm Labor?

- **4 or more contractions in an hour.**
  - It is normal to have some contractions of your uterus. They can happen when you change positions, such as from sitting to lying down.
  - If you have 4 or more contractions in an hour, this is a sign of preterm labor. Contractions that come this often can cause your cervix to open up and the baby might come early.
- **A low dull back ache** below your waistline. The ache might come and go or it might be constant.
  - Remember, low back pain is often a common and normal part of pregnancy as the baby grows.
  - In preterm labor, back pain usually changes suddenly. It is usually strong, and comes and goes.
- **Discharge (fluid)** coming from your vagina that is new or different from normal.
  - An increase in vaginal discharge is normal in pregnancy.
  - In preterm labor, the change is often sudden, and might be watery, mucousy, or bloody like a period.



## How Do I Know If I'm Having Contractions?

- Lie down. Put your fingertips on the top of your uterus.
- If your uterus is contracting, you will feel your abdomen get tight or hard during the contraction. Then you'll feel it relax or soften when the contraction is over.
- Preterm contractions may or may not be painful.



## What Are The Signs of Preterm Labor? (continued)

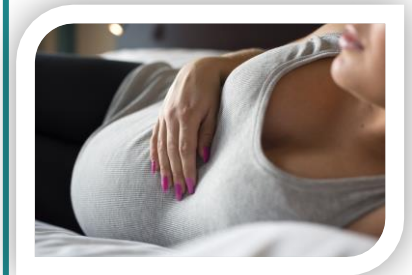
- **Cramps** (like when you have your period) in the lower belly. The cramps might come and go or they might be constant. You may have diarrhea or you might not.
- **Pressure in your pelvis** that changes suddenly.
  - Pressure in your pelvis can be normal as the baby gets bigger.
  - In preterm labor it might feel like your baby is pushing down or the pressure might come and go. It usually happens along with some of the other signs that are listed on the first page.

## Is Preterm Labor Dangerous?

When someone has preterm labor contractions, their uterus tightens and their cervix may open earlier than normal. This can cause an early birth. If a baby is born early, it can have problems breathing, eating, and keeping warm. That's why it is important to watch for signs of preterm labor.

## What Should I Do If I'm Having Preterm Labor?

- **Lie down on your side.** Place a pillow at your back for support. Don't lie flat on your back, but don't turn too far forward on your side either.
  - Lying flat on your back might cause the contractions to happen more often.
  - If you lie too far forward you might not be able to feel the contractions.
- **Drink several large glasses of water** and pee often. Sometimes being dehydrated can cause contractions.
- **Try taking a warm bath.** Sometimes this can relax your muscles so your contractions slow down or stop.
- **Track your contractions for 1 hour.**
  - Count the number of minutes from the **start** of one contraction to the **start** of the next. That will tell you how often they are occurring.
  - If you have more than 4 contractions in 1 hour, this is a sign of preterm labor. Call OB Triage at 272-2460.



### Did you know?

Some people have more risk of having preterm labor—for example, if you are having twins or if you have had a preterm birth in the past.

Ask your provider if you have a higher chance of having preterm labor.